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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter V
Review of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Introduction and overview

1. At its 452nd meeting, on 8 September 2003, the Committee on Conferences considered the programme narrative on General Assembly affairs and conference services of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/58/6 (sect. 2)), programme 6 of the medium-term plan for the period 2004-2005, and heard an introduction by a representative of the Secretariat on the matter.

2. The Committee was informed that the proposed budget was based on the current reform and was intended to formalize the changes envisioned in the Secretary-General's report on improving the performance of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/57/289). The first year of reform had already yielded tangible budgetary results. While the Department in New York had exceeded its initial appropriations by $11 million and $27.6 million in the biennia 1998-1999 and 2000-2001, it had been able to stay within its budget allotment in 2002 and expected to discharge all its functions by the end of 2003 within its 2002-2003 budgetary appropriation.

3. The salient features of the proposed budget were zero resource growth, redeployment of resources and an emphasis on information technology. It was cost-neutral in the short term, with increases in information technology resources being offset by decreases in staffing costs achieved by a shift from a resource-intensive, demand-driven approach to a management-intensive, results-oriented strategy. The

proposed budget also entailed reclassifications to reflect realigned priorities and to integrate the technical secretariats of the Fifth and Sixth Committees into the Department.

Discussion

4. The view was expressed that, without seeking to duplicate the work of the Fifth Committee, the Committee on Conferences had a mandate, based on General Assembly resolution 43/222, to look at the proposed budget from the standpoint of the pattern of conferences and to make recommendations to ensure the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.

5. Many delegations welcomed the improvement in the Department's budgetary situation. A number of delegations expressed the view that, while they were in favour of fiscal discipline, they were concerned that the reduction in staffing costs might result in a loss in the quality or quantity of services to Member States, for example, in a reduction in the servicing of meetings of regional groups. The representative of the Secretariat explained that the Department had achieved savings, and expected to do the same in the next biennium, not by cutting back on high-quality services but by shifting from crisis-style management to advanced planning.

6. It was noted that the proposed budget lacked performance measures in a number of areas. User satisfaction surveys were useful but were not a substitute for objective indicators in assessing the success of the Department's reforms.

Conclusions and recommendations

7. **The Committee recommended that the General Assembly give careful consideration to the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 for conference services, taking into account the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Committee concerning the relevant items on its agenda.**